

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

"Basil's Asparagus" (*Xerolirion divaricata* A.S. George): The Man Behind The Name — In volume 46 of the Flora of Australia published on 2nd May 1986, the first volume of the Flora dealing with Monocotyledons, a new monotypic genus *Xerolirion* in the family Xanthorrhoeaceae was described by Alex George. *X. divaricata* was given the vernacular name "Basil's Asparagus" in the Flora and the purpose of this note is to place on record the circumstances surrounding the adoption of this name.

The person commemorated is Basil H. Smith who has farmed near Manmanning for many years. For a number of years Basil and Mary Smith have collected specimens from groups in which several of the botanists at the National Herbarium of Victoria are especially interested as well as specimens of general interest. These specimens have been incorporated into the collections of the National Herbarium of Victoria with duplicates being lodged in the Western Australian Herbarium and in other herbaria.

Among the specimens sent in by Basil Smith in mid-1984 was a peculiar plant that could not be keyed out but which showed an approach to *Acanthocarpus* and to *Lomandra* while, at the same time, being reminiscent of *Asparagus*. It comes as no surprise that many of the specimens sent in by Basil and Mary Smith either have no name at present, represent interesting finds of rare species or extensions of the range of distribution of known species. Later in 1984 and again the following year Basil Smith sent in further collections of this species, and, as there was no scientific name available for the plant, it became known to the staff at the National Herbarium of Victoria as "Basil's Asparagus." This name in turn found its way back to Western Australia as it was included in a list of determinations sent to the Smiths. The Smiths were not the first to collect this species but, realizing that it was of interest, went to some lengths to find additional populations of it and collect fertile material of both sexes.

While carrying out field work in Western Australia in connection with his work on the plant he was describing as *Xerolirion divaricata*, Alex George became aware that the name "Basil's Asparagus" was already being used by several people and consequently he adopted it as the vernacular name for the species.

— J.H. ROSS, National Herbarium of Victoria, Birdwood Avenue,
South Yarra, Victoria, 3141